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ABSTRACT

The paper reports some of the results of a preliminary survey of the language proficiency of matriculation students of French in Britain and Australia. The technique used (especially the use of Chief Examiners' reports) is justified and the deficiencies that exist in current matriculation examinations are noted. In particular, the examinations are observed to rely heavily on traditional grammar-translation-literature approaches, to test examination-specific skills, and to give little weight to oral skills. The conclusion is drawn that they give little direct information on proficiency interpreted as communicative competence. Typical errors and inadequacies found in matriculants' language are discussed at length with particular attention being given to formal accuracy, discourse and cohesion, prepositions, vocabulary, registers and functions. The average level attained by students at the end of Secondary School is estimated at S-1+, R-1+ on the FSI Scale. Finally, the study is used to suggest teaching and learning needs for post-matriculation courses. (Author/AM)

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LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AT MATRICULATION

Report of a Preliminary Survey into the Proficiency of British and Australian Students of French at Matriculation

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports some of the results of a preliminary study made in 1975 of the language proficiency of matriculation students of French in Britain and Australia. The study attempted to specify the level of proficiency reached on the five-point scale of Absolute Language Proficiency Ratings of the Foreign Service Institute School of Language Studies [1968] (see Figure 1), a scale which has been shown to predict accurately the learner's ability to use the language in social and professional situations [Wilds 1965] and which Carroll [1967] has found to correlate closely with the *MLA Proficiency Tests for Teachers and Advanced Students*. In addition, the survey attempted to identify the areas of need in the matriculation student's language development.

Rating	Performance Level	Estimated Time for Average Student of French in Intensive Course	Level Reached by Matricualtion
S-5, R-5	Native or Bilingual Proficiency		
S-4, R-4	Full Professional Proficiency		
S-3, R-3	Minimum Professional Proficiency	32 weeks/960 hours	
S-2, R-2	Limited Working Proficiency	16 weeks/480 hours	S-1+ R-1+
S-1, R-1	Elementary Proficiency	8 weeks/240 hours	5 years

Figure 1: Proficiency Levels on the FSI Scale.

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II. REASONS FOR THE STUDY

A clear specification of the level of proficiency and areas of development or deficiency in the language of matriculation students enables the teacher (a) to assess the success of secondary school programmes and (b) to construct subsequent courses on a knowledge of the students' capabilities

and needs. Such a study could, in Reed's words [1971:123], establish a "point de départ" for future courses. However, no other study is available, there is certainly no study at matriculation comparable to Carroll's [1967] for language majors in U.S. colleges and universities in the mid-sixties, and the I.E.A. survey [Carroll 1975] did not include Australia and was not sufficiently diagnostic to permit its use in detailed course design.

III. APPROACH USED

The preliminary study reported here was based on the reports of the Chief Examiners for ten examining authorities in Britain and Australia over a period from 1970 to 1974.(1) The British reports consulted included those for "O" and "A" levels and, in some cases, for "S", a "Special" paper for advanced students.

Serious difficulties arise when one tries to use the Chief Examiners' reports to gain an impression of student proficiency. First, the reports seem to be mainly concerned to list common faults and it is, therefore, easy to receive an unduly pessimistic impression of the students' language. Secondly, the examinations on which they are based are generally designed (often by university appointees) to select for tertiary entry; that is, to predict the students' likelihood of success in university courses which, in teaching and examining practice, generally retain the traditional grammar-translation-literature focus [note Australian Academy of the Humanities Committee on Foreign Languages 1975:33; James and Rouve 1973:90-130; Working Party on Languages and Linguistics 1975:30]. Partly in consequence, matriculation examinations remain highly traditional with heavy emphasis on formal grammar, translation, and literature. It can, in fact, be argued that the skills tested are examination-specific and have little to do with communicative competence or practical language proficiency. This is further emphasized when one realizes that translation as a special language function [cf. James and Rouve 1973:5] and literary appreciation are highly sophisticated skills requiring levels of, perhaps, S-4, R-4 on the FSI scales, far beyond most matriculants.

Thirdly, oral skills receive scant recognition, nowhere exceeding 25% weighting and often being much lower [cf. James and Rouve 1973: Table 12 and Harding 1975]. Fourthly, as the first two problems suggest, there is considerable confusion in the purpose or goals of the examinations on which the reports are based. This partly results from the lack (in most regions) of an explicitly defined syllabus on which to base the examinations with the result that the examinations have effectively become the syllabuses and depend in turn on tradition and the intuitive judgement of the examiners [cf. Hawkins 1970:39].

This confusion is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the literature component of matriculation examinations. Doubtless it is included in response to vaguely felt but strenuously expressed urgings towards general educational and cultural objectives but the result is to confuse the *development* of a skill with its sophisticated *application* in literary appreciation [cf. James and Rouve 1973:59]. A level of R-4 on the FSI Scales or "Advanced" on Stern's [1974] is needed before literary appreciation is possible. Up to matriculation, one might expect that the focus of attention would be on developing fluent reading skills. Yet this is not so, literary appreciation is expected, it is not achieved, and it is probable that bad reading habits are developed. Some examiners' comments reveal the problem:

(1) To preserve the confidentiality some requested, the examining authorities will be referred to by code and not name. The four-symbol references show in order: author's code for the examining authority, level (i.e. O, A, S, HSC etc.), year, page in the report consulted.

> *... too many synopses of plot in lieu of answers; too much irrelevant material of all kinds; too many answers (often clearly prepared) to questions others than the ones on the paper."* [Quoted in James and Rouve 1973:60]
>
> *... how much credibility can one attach to an apparently thorough understanding of four texts from widely different epochs ... accompanied by a minimal showing on translation from the language, not to mention gross errors in writing it?"* [Ibid:60]

In addition, Harding [1975] and Carroll [1967a:59] found that literature results bore no significant correlation with other estimates of student language proficiency.

Similar problems exist with the translation questions but time precludes their discussion here except to note that the "prose" questions seem to demand a problem-solving rather than language production approach and their results have little correlation with the freer production seen in essays [e.g. IV.A.70.30; XII. CSYS. 73.9;VII. HSC.70.14]. In addition, it is worth recalling that the Institute of Linguists prohibits its members from translating into the L2 [Institute of Linguists 1974] in the belief that only native speakers can have sufficient competence to translate into a language; yet this exercise is a major component of matriculation examinations and one is left wondering whether it actually is a normal language skill that is involved in answering it.

Despite these obvious problems, the Chief Examiners' Reports have some values in a study such as this. First, the examining authorities would claim that they have been prepared by competent speakers of the language who are highly experienced in examining and teaching. Secondly, their use effectively means that the sample that can be surveyed is vastly increased from perhaps a few dozen subjects to tens of thousands. Thirdly, there is a striking similarity between the reports of the different examining authorities in the U.K. and Australia. Fourthly, despite the individual differences that occur within any set of matriculation students, certain persistent characteristics do emerge from the reports, there is much repetition in the errors noted, and the examiners frequently comment that those listed are typical of the majority of students [e.g. VII.HSC.70.15; IV.A.74.31;II.A.72.13]. Fifthly, the way in which they were used makes them more useful; that is, instead of their being taken as direct statements of proficiency, their findings have been used diagnostically, for comparison with some notion of communicative competence, and to suggest probable placement of matriculants on the FSI Scales. The results given accord well with estimates made in other ways. Sixthly, the reports indicate issues that must be looked at in more direct assessments of student proficiency.

IV. TYPICAL ERRORS AND INADEQUACIES

As has already been observed, there is a danger in using Examiners' Reports that an unduly negative estimate will result from concentrating on what students cannot, rather than what they can do, and from the examiners' concern with surface "cosmetic" features whose neglect does not impair communication even though they are observed by careful native speakers. Nevertheless, it is possible to see beyond such "errors" to gain some idea of more generalized and explanatory aspects of language development such as mastery of discourse, cohesion, functions or registers.

IV.I FORMAL ACCURACY

Without exception, examiners complain of poor formal accuracy and, like teachers, accuse the students of "carelessness" [I.O.73.5; IV.A.74.31], of being "unintelligent" [e.g. II.O.72.8;I,O.71.1], or of failure to use "any 'spare' time in the correction of even the most glaring and elementary errors of agreement" [II.O.72.4]. However, to explain such errors by "carelessness" ignores more fundamental causes. First, these errors have occurred during crucial examinations when motivation to take care is at a maximum. Secondly, if the cause were only carelessness, one would expect similar errors in the students' English. Thirdly, many of the errors noted (such as some verb endings) are not uncommon amongst native speakers or are learned relatively late in the L1 development schedule. Confusion in genders, a common source of error [e.g. II.A.71.9; II.O.71.13; I.O.71.4; IV.S.70.41; VII.HSC.71.3; XVII.M.74.1] cannot be explained in this way. Spelling is everywhere described as poor [e.g. I.O.71.4; IV.O.70.7; IV.S.70.41; IV.A.71.30; VII.HSC.71.1; XIII.A.70.14], especially with respect to use of accents, spelling of common words, and confusion of homophones (e.g. *bal* and *balle* [IV.A.72.32]; *moi* and *mois* [IV.S.70.41]; *temps* and *tant* [II.O.72.9]). However, carelessness is not sufficient to explain such errors and, rather, they seem to result from ignorance of sound-spelling relationships. Thus, *e, é, and è* are interchanged (e.g. *prẽs* for *près, mére, deja, decidé, dejeuner* [II.O.72.5, 9; I.O.71.4]; *s* and *ss* are confused [II.O.72.9]; the effect of an *e* on a preceding *g* or final *s* is not realized [I.O.71.4]; and the occurrence of single or double letters or accents in verbs such as *jeter* or *mener* seems to be arbitrary [e.g. IV.S.70.41; XVII.M.73.1]). Mountford's [1975] study of L1 spelling amongst student teachers in England provides relevant insights. He found that few of them had any understanding of the orthographic rules of English and when they were pointed out rapid improvement in spelling resulted. With advanced L2 students wishing to improve their writing skills, similar procedures may be appropriate.

IV.2 COHESION AND DISCOURSE

All agreements are a constant source of "inaccuracy", subject-verb [e.g. II.O.72.4; XIII.O.73.16; XIV.HSC.72.2], adjective-noun (e.g. *une bon odeur* [II.AO.72.13]) pronoun-antecedent (e.g. *soeurs...ils* [II.O.72.7]) and reflexive pronoun - subject [e.g. II.O.72.7]. Such errors are generally considered to be superficial, due to carlessness, interference or ignorance of a rule. However, they commonly occur in items taught from the earliest stages of most language courses and their cause must be sought elsewhere. They seem, in fact, to be symptomatic of failure at the level of cohesion and discourse, i.e. a failure to relate parts of the text or to spontaneously bring the redundancies of the language to bear on comprehension and to provide cohesion in production. To some extent at least, this seems to result from teaching-learning procedures that develop word-by-word operations in comprehension and production as the learner translates into or out of the L1. It is worth recalling that this word-by-word, accumulative approach to language use is in direct contrast to the hierarchic development of syntax in L1 acquisition, a development from a cohering semantic unit expressed initially through holophrases towards the gradual filling out of the component parts in that unit. One examiner commented, as an example of the problem, that, in the listening test, many students "had been dazzled by recogniton of isolated words instead of seeking to absorb the sense of the material" [IV.O.70.9]. A similar absorption with discrete words in production

results in the sorts of errors noted earlier. Contributing to this is the students' limited short-term memory in the L2 with the result that they are unable to retain enough of an utterance and the syntactic and semantic relationships in order to mark those relationships appropriately. The *soeurs...ils* example cited earlier exemplifies this and, in other cases, the short-term capacity seems not to extend beyond two words producing such common errors as *ils nous verrions* [I.A.71.26 and compare IV.A.70.30]. This explanation (in terms of cohesion, discourse, and short-term memory) accounts also for the matriculants' inability to handle complex sentences.

The explanation of agreement errors in terms of cohesion [defined in Halliday and Hasan 1976:6] receives further justification from an examination of the matriculants' use of pronouns, which are important cohesive devices. In fact, little facility in their use is evident in comprehension or production. In comprehension, the relationships they signal are often misinterpreted (e.g. *la fit entrer, she entered; pour vous permettre, you are permitted* [I.O.71.1 and I.A.71.26] while, in production, they are either not used [e.g., I.O.73.5; IV.O.70.7; XIII.O.71.44; IV.A.70.31] or there are errors in their forms, position, or agreement [e.g. II.O.72.7; II.A.72.13; I.O.73.5; IV.O.71.9; IV.A.72.32; VII.HSC.71.7; XIV.HSC. 73.2]. Failure to perceive and use the endophoric or exophoric functions of pronouns reflects the word-by-word approach to language use and is illustrated in the conversation one examiner quoted:

> *Est-ce que votre soeur...? Oui, votre soeur...*
> [cf. XIII.O.74.11]

This is further illustrated in the failure to observe pronominal agreement rules while the non-agreement of possessive adjectives and antecedents (e.g. the use of *son* for *leur*) confirms that it is not just a question of English interference [e.g. II.O.72.7]. Other examples include the failure to appreciate or use the force of the reflexive pronoun (e.g. to distinguish *arrêter, s'arrêter; apercevoir, s'apercevoir)* [II.O.72.4; IV.O.73.10; VII.HSC.72.9], failure to use pronouns to avoid repetition [e.g. IV.O.70.7] or to combine sentences into more complex utterances [e.g. IX.O.71.26; IV.A.70.31], and confusion between *c'est* and *il est* [e.g. IV.A.71.30; IV.O.72.12; VII.HSC.70.17; XIV.HSC.73.2].

Other difficulties occur with all of the pronominal forms but those quoted so far will suffice to illustrate the problem. It clearly is not enough to attribute them to carelessness or interference. It is worth noting that both Carol Chomsky [1969] and Kessel [1970] consider pronominalization to be a relatively late acquisition dependent on cognitive maturation [cf. Chomsky 1969:109-110]. Matriculation students clearly do have sufficient cognitive maturation to cope with pronominalization but mastery of the forms involved, the syntactic and morphological realization of the principle of pronominalization, may well depend on prior mastery of other aspects of the language, in particular on realization of the principles governing cohesion in the language. The use of pronominalization clearly also depends on the expansion of short-term memory capacity. In addition, the traditional decontextualized, sentence-based and cryptographic approach to language teaching reduces the learner's experience of pronominalization giving him less, meaningful practice with the system and preventing his experiencing its endophoric and exophoric functions. In addition, he will fail to experience or use certain of the language functions that pronouns significantly carry such as, for instance, depersonalization and the expression of

diminished responsibility (e.g. impersonal expressions such as *il lui vint l'idée* [IV.O.72.12; VII.HSC.71.2] or *on* [IV.O.71.10] are beyond many matriculants) but this will be discussed more fully subsequently.

At the inter-sentence or textual level, similar problems occur and difficulties emerge with those features that mark relationships between sentences, combine sentences into more complex utterances, or mark the thread of discourse. This may, at least if Kaplan's views are correct [1966 and 1972], relate to the matriculants' failure to acquire the L2 model of the world and its pattern of thought development. In any case, the reports show that few students at this level can plan their essays acceptably so that comments such as the following are commonplace:

> *The basic idea of an essay escapes quite a few candidates. It is not just a haphazard garnering of thoughts.....* [II.A.72.14]
>
> *The essays rarely conveyed a sense of shape or progression.* [IV.A.70.31]
>
> *... sometimes little more than lists of words strung together.* [XIII.O.74.11]

It is significant, however, that in one of the few reports that commented favourably on students' written production a so-called "Written Re-production" exercise replaced the essay thus removing the necessity to produce ideas or sequence them appropriately whereas the alternative essay on the same paper elicited performance just as poor as noted elsewhere [XIII.O.74.10-11]. Equally significantly, the precis, which requires selection of key ideas which, in turn, the discourse features often serve to mark out, seems to be equally poorly done and to reveal inadequate comprehension [e.g. II.AO.74.12; XVII.M.74.1; XVII.M.70.1].

The students' inability to handle the various linkers that mark out discourse structure is frequently noted [e.g. IV.S.72.40; IV.A.72.32; IV.O.74.9; XIV.HSC.73.1]. Subordinating connectives such as relative pronouns and conjunctions are beyond most students and this is reflected in the matriculants' inability to comprehend or produce complex structures. In production, one typical comment referred to the monotonous simplicity of sentence structures [e.g. IV.A.70.31] while the failure to comprehend complex sentences was evident, for example, in oral reading tests:

> *The sense of the long sentences...is not sustained, reflecting the elementary level of appreciation of sentence structure found in conversation.* [II.A.68.10 and compare IV.O.72.12]

Inter-sentence linkers such as *aussi*, *donc* and *car* were frequently misunderstood to the point of falsifying arguments [e.g. II.O.72.3; XIV.HSC.72.4; XIV.HSC.73.1; I.A.73.28]. Similarly Holland [1970] has noted the weakness of First Year university students in sentence linkers and Kenning observed at the BAAL testing workshop in Southampton in March 1975 that her French students were unable to follow arguments in their History texts because they were unable to utilize the connectives to follow the line of that argument.

It is clear that, in order to improve both productive and receptive performance, students entering tertiary language classes require specific attention directed at improving their facility with the features of discourse and cohesion.

IV.3 PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are traditionally a major source of difficulty for students of French and have usually been treated at a superficial, lexical level. They usually receive much attention from early stages of a language course even in those cases where their communicative import is slight (e.g. after some verbs). It can be argued that this isboth undesirable and ineffective. They are one of the major sources of error at matriculation, which suggests that their teaching has been ineffective, while the heavy emphasis they receive often results in the students being seriously inhibited in their readiness to use the language. The difficulties experienced are not surprising, however, if one recalls that the order of acquisition of structures in the L1 is influenced by their complexity as measured by the number and precision of the semantic and functional discriminations that have to be made [cf. Chomsky 1969; Kessel 1970]. In addition, it is now commonplace in developmental psycholinguistics to recognize the hierarchic development of syntax. Thus, it is premature to expect students to make many of the distinctions between prepositions before more global structures are mastered. Nevertheless, by the end of secondary school, the sentential macrostructures have been acquired and attention to the microstructures, including correct use of prepositions, can be expected.

Commonly, many of the errors involving prepositions have been explained by interference from English, e.g., confusion of prepositions and similar conjunctions (*avant de, avant que* [IV.S.73.42]; *pendant, pendant que* [II.A.72.14]) or omission of prepositions after indefinite pronouns [e.g. VII.HSC.73.6; VII.HSC.71.4]. However, many of the errors with prepositions are also explicable by more generalized deficiencies and it would seem unlikely that any attempt to treat them at the word level would succeed. Thus, for example, it was noted earlier that students adopt a word-by-word approach to language use which is reflected in an inability to utilize the features of cohesion and discourse. The most persistent errors (viz. the misuse or non-use of prepositions after verbs, adjectives and indefinite pronouns or in distinguishing *C'est + adjective + à + infinitive* from *Il est + adjective + de + infinitive)* fall into this category. The limited complexity that, we observed, students can handle (a complexity measured in terms of the number and nicety of the functional and semantic discriminations to be made) is seen also in their inability to discriminate *à, dans,* and *en* [e.g. II.O.71.14; XIII.O.74.10] or to take account of both aspect and time duration in distinguishing *pour, pendant* and *depuis* [e.g. XII.CSYS.72.8]. Similarly, while word meaning can be handled, students seem unable to cope as well with categorial and contextual features. This is seen in the confusion of prepositions and conjunctions and in the misuse of prepositions after verbs. It is also seen in the difficulties noted earlier in distinguishing such structures as *Il est difficile de faire cela* from *C'est difficile à faire.* This also illustrates the students' failure to observe the markers in the sentence that relate parts of utterances, that is, that signal deep structure relationships even though they are signalled by several

redundant features (e.g. the pronouns, prepositions, word meanings and context). This is also seen in the problems experienced with *depuis, pendant* and *pour* where the time perspective and verb tense supply additional levels of redundancy. Finally, this last example illustrates another source of difficulty, noted in passing earlier but frequently recurring, viz., the need, at the same time as the L2 is learned, to acquire a matching model of the world [cf. Elias and Ingram 1977], i.e, the learner must be able to perceive and segment reality according to the native speaker's model of the world if he is to discriminate and readily use such prepositions as *à* and *de* after *jouer* [I.O.71.4] or *en, à, par* where English uses *by* for means of travel [XIII.O.74.10]. Thus, the difficulties that matriculation students experience with prepositions cannot be explained only at the lexical level but involve issues of cohesion and conceptual structure as well and subsequent teaching must be designed to take these into account.

IV.4 VOCABULARY

Without exception, examiners consider inadequate vocabulary development to be the major constraint on language performance at this level [e.g. XIV.HSC.73; II.A.68.11; IV.A.71.30]. Typical comments include:

> *The majority [of letters], however, bordered on the ridiculous and trivial because they were limited by inadequate vocabulary...* [II.O.72.5]
>
> *... almost total ignorance...of vocabulary.* [I.S.71.28]
>
> *... major gaps in elementary vocabulary.* [IV.A.72.30]
>
> *Common vocabulary is surprisingly weak.* [VII.HSC.70.12]

It is particularly striking that the major weakness is in the area of the "everyday" vocabulary of home, school, and community life. This is not unexpected when one considers that few programmes encourage the learner to experience and use the language outside of the classroom. In addition, the passivity of the classroom gives him little opportunity to use the language for self-expression, little practice in the ready recall of items, and little opportunity to integrate his own concepts with the language. Consequently, examiners observe that students are left groping for words when they are operating under pressure as in an examination and especially in the oral test [e.g. II.A.71.8; II.A.68.10; IV.A.73.31]. In contrast, students who have been to the C2 and have thus had an opportunity to experience and use purposefully the "everyday" vocabulary reveal fewer deficiencies [e.g. II.AO.71.4].

IV.5 REGISTERS

The preceding comments suggest that students may lack the general non-specialist register used in everyday life in the C2. In fact, the reports seem to suggest that most students at this level have little sensitivity towards or facility in using register variations. It is seen in their lack of vocabulary to discuss everyday events or "contemporary matters [and] problems of general interest" as they relate to the C2 [II.A.71.3, 8]; it is seen in their gratuitous mixing of *tu* and *vous* [e.g. II.O.71.3; II.O.72.5,6; IV.O.71.9; VII.HSC.70.12; XIII.O.70.14; XIII.A.73.56; XIV.HSC.72.4];

it is seen in their indiscriminant use of literary language [cf. Holland 1970]; and it is seen in their lack of what might be called a conversational register with its distinctive skills, courtesy features [e.g. XIII.A.73.56; I.O.73.6; XIV.HSC.73.3], and those aspects of language needed to discuss the students' own lives, interests, homes, families and activities [e.g. II.O.71.4,12; II.A.68.10; IV.A.74.30; VII.HSC.73.7; XII.A.73.56]. These comments indicate a certain inflexibility in the handling of register distinctions but, in addition, they highlight the unrealistic "schoolroom French" that students experience, their failure to experience the L2 as a real language operating for purposes of significance to them in their own lives, and they indicate an urgent need for advanced learners to experience the language in real life situations outside of the classroom [see Ingram 1976 and 1976a where this was discussed at length].

IV.6 LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Although the type of matriculation examination that is set gives limited attention to language functions, some picture of the students' functional mastery does emerge. However, as one would expect from students who have largely followed courses that concentrate on teaching discrete correct sentences, little functional mastery is evident.

The heuristic, personal and interactional functions (though developed early in L1 acquisition [Halliday 1975]) seem to be undeveloped in matriculation L2 students. The heuristic function is manifested grammatically in question formation and the examiners frequently comment on students' inability to frame questions properly [II.A.72.14; XIII.O.70.14]. This is not surprising in view of the teacher dominated classroom where, in general, the teacher asks questions for the student to answer and where the interpersonal relationships involved militate against the students' asking questions especially of a personal nature. Consequently, also, it is not surprising that the personal and interactional functions are deficient and that examiners comment on the students' inability to express their own ideas [e.g. VII.HSC.70.2; VII.HSC.71.2; XII.CSYS.73.11; IV.A.71.31; and Holland 1970; Russell 1970]. It is unlikely in fact that such functions can be learned in a classroom with the restricted variety of context it can offer and the teacher needs to structure situations where more diverse interpersonal relationships exist. In addition, matriculation students lack the functions to handle conversations (i.e. they are unable to use language and related devices to enter, continue and close conversations) [e.g. IV.A.73.33; IV.O.74.11; XIII.A.73.56]. This deficiency is reflected more positively in the apparent success of courses that aim specifically at teaching such skills in post-matriculation classes [e.g. Cowie and Heaton 1977].

Those functions that permit the speaker or writer to express diminished responsibility, to depersonalize his utterance and to express the hypothetical are apparently not mastered at this level. Frequent errors occur with the use of *on* [e.g. IV.O.71.10] and impersonal constructions [IV.O.72.12; VII.HSC.71.2] while the successful use of conditionals and other devices to mitigate what is said or to express the hypothetical is rare [e.g. II.A.71.8; XIV.HSC.72.1; VII.HSC.73.7; VII.HSC.70.14].

V. CONCLUSION

Time has not permitted any more than a rapid glance at some aspects of the language proficiency of matriculation students of French. In doing so, the attempt has been made to look beyond some of the more common deficiencies and to seek explanations in the light of aspects of language which assume particular importance in communication, aspects such as cohesion, discourse, model of the world, register and functions. This together with a more extensive review of the Chief Examiners' reports that I have made elsewhere [Ph.D. thesis, unpublished], permits some estimate of proficiency at matriculation to be made.

In fact, the reports almost without exception are severe in lamenting low proficiency levels [cf. IV.A.71.30; II.O.72.3; II.A.72.22; I.S.71.28; IV.S.70.41] and one must conclude, especially when the deficiencies in the non-specialist or "everyday" register are considered, that few matriculation students reach beyond S-1+, R-1+ on the FSI scale. This means that they have less than "limited working proficiency" and are still unable to satisfy routine social demands. To qualify for S-2, they must be able to handle with confidence even if not with complete facility most social situations and conversations on work, family, and current events. Clearly, few matriculants reach this level of proficiency.

Let me conclude with a very concise summary of the teaching and learning needs for post-matriculation courses that emerge from such a study of matriculation proficiency:

1. Recognition of the functional role of language and of the priority of the communication task and the content over the language itself. This will come through purposeful use of the language for the achievement of worthwhile and desired ends.

2. Fostering of personal self-expression in situations and on topics immediately relevant to the learner and his developmental (i.e. linguistic, social, psychological and educational) needs and in interaction with his peers and with native speakers.

3. Shift of attention to units greater than one word or one sentence and ability to use the devices of cohesion and discourse.

4. Expansion of short-term memory in the L2.

5. Development of the learner's ability to take the initiative in language use in order to counteract the largely passive role he has experienced in the L2 classroom.

6. Active use of the L2 in diverse real-life situations of interest and relevance to the individual in order to contextualize the language in a variety of total communication situations.

7. Replacement of the notion of the overriding importance of correct, discrete sentences or detailed comprehension with notions of speed, efficiency and effectiveness of communication.

8. Development of a congruent conceptual structure or model of the world and its integration with the L2.

9. In summary: focus on use, focus on communication, focus on the learner.

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EXAMINING AUTHORITIES APPROACHED

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Note: In order to respect the confidentiality requested by certain examining authorities, all those approached have been listed even though four of them were unable, for various reasons, to make their reports available. The Authorities are listed here alphabetically.